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Jeff Meyer, Editor

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Photography week

CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE

NEWS

FUJIFILM ANNOUNCES THE NEW GFX 100 II

Medium format gets a speed boost, plus Lumix G9 II unveiled

FEATURE

THE RAPTOR FACTOR

Pro tips for capturing stunning shots of birds of prey in flight

PHOTOS

GALLERY

Our pick of the best reader photos from around the world

INSPIRATION

ARTISTRY UNLEASHED

Stunning images from the photo contest with no limits on creativity

CRASH COURSE

THE FRAME GAME

Discover simple techniques for improving your outdoor portraits

PHOTOSHOP

SHOOT A FOCUS STACK

Extend your depth of field for super-sharp macro images

REVIEW

SONY A6700

Sony upgrades its crop-sensor camera with its latest autofocus and IBIS tech, and better video. Is this the new best APS-C camera for travel photography? Find out in our review

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WHAT'S HOT

THE WEEK'S TOP HEADLINES IN PHOTOGRAPHY

FUJIFILM GFX 100 II ADDS SPEED TO MEDIUM FORMAT

This could be the most powerful and useable medium-format camera yet

© Fujifilm

Fujifilm has unveiled the Fujifilm GFX 100 II, with an impressive spec sheet that rewrites the rulebook for medium-format cameras, headlined by shooting speeds never before seen in medium format. There's also highly effective phase-detect autofocus, including human and animal trakcing, and 8-stop in-body image stabilisation.

The Fujifilm GFX 100 II is built around a brand new high-speed 102MP CMOS sensor, which is paired with a new custom version of the company's latest X-Processor 5 that's been used to great acclaim in the latest X-Series cameras like the Fujifilm X-H2S.

This new sensor/processor combo allows the GFX 100 II to output a staggeringly fast (for medium format) eight frames per second with continuous autofocus at full resolution. This is combined with a buffer that has twice the capacity of the previous model, and which is capable of handling up to 325 raw shots, or 75 shots in RAW+JPEG mode.

The GFX 100 II can shoot in 16-bit HQ RAW, HEIF 10-bit, and JPEG, with files offering over 30% more dynamic range than the previous model's, and with a new base ISO of 80. The GFX 100 II is also capable of 400-megapixel Pixel Shift images made up of 16 combined raw files, and now can use just four images to achieve a true-colour image.

Fujifilm has also added a 13th (or 20th if you count variations) of film simulation with Fujifilm Reala Ace film, which offers a lower saturation than standard Provia but maintains a neutral tone.

The autofocus has also been improved to take advantage of the latest subject recognition and tracking algorithms from Fujifilm, including humans, animals, vehicles, and insects. There's also been additional development of Fujifilm's human face and eye recognition, given this camera's interest to portrait photographers. The GFX 100 II now offers up to eight stops of in-body image stabilisation when used with compatible lenses.

© Fujifilm

Video

When it comes to video, the GFX 100 II is capable of 4K 60p 4:2:2 10-bit video internally with no crop, as well as 8K 24p with a 1.42x crop, or 8K 30p with a 1.51x crop, and Full HD up to 120p.

Recording is possible in Apple ProRes as well as Fujifilm's F-Log2 to reach 13+ stops of dynamic range, which can be pushed to 14+ stops in D Range Priority; however, this limits the video to 4K30p with a slight increase to rolling shutter.

Further recording, including ProRes RAW or Blackmagic RAW, can be attained using external recorders.

Recording times, which has been a bane for other cameras, are also impressive. At 4K30p the GFX 100 II can record for 38 minutes in 40C heat and for 151 minutes in 25C, but when combined with the Fujifilm FAN-001 cooling fan, at 25C there's no limit on recording times. What's more, the GFX 100 II can also record directly to SSD in all video formats for faster offloading during projects.

The GFX 100 II is making a serious play to be the camera choice for video professionals, with a range of high-end features including IDT support (the cinema standard colour space), focus mapping, vector scope, and waveform directly available in live view. The GFX 100 II's new 'Video Format' is also able to adapt its video size based on which cinema lens is attached (using an adapter), using different areas of the sensor – for example a Fujinon Premista lens or a Zeiss lens.

© Fujifilm

Body and design

The body is a fairly significant departure from the original Fujifilm GFX 100, ditching the integrated grip, and falling in line with the more recent GFX 100S and GFX 50S II bodies. However, for anyone missing the vertical grip, an optional VG-GFX II vertical battery grip with additional controls on the grip is available, sold separately. Speaking of batteries, the GFX 100 II will use Fujfilm's NP-W235 battery, which should be good for around 540 frames (a 20% improvement on the GFX 100) or 60 minutes of 4K30p recording.

The GFX 100 II uses the EVF-TL1 detachable and tilting eyelevel viewfinder with a 9.44m dot resolution, a variable magnification of up to 1.0x, and up to 120p refresh rate. The camera also features a 2.09-inch top monitor and a 3-inch 9.44m-dot three-way tilting screen on the rear. Otherwise, the layout is very similar to the original GFX100, with the addition of three new custom-function buttons near the shutter.

The GFX 100 II finally gets an upgrade to a CFExpress card Type-B slot, which sits alongside an SD UHS-II card slot. For camera communication, the GFX 100 II features an Ethernet cable port, as well as direct wireless upload to Adobe's Frame.io cloud.

The Fujifilm GFX100 II will be available from September 26, and is available to pre-order now, priced at £6,999 / $7,499. This makes the GFX 100 II around £1,500 / $1,500 more expensive than the GFX 100S, although the new camera comes with a significant raft of improvements, and is around £2,500 / $2,000 cheaper than the original GFX100, although to get the same ergonomics you do need to add on the optional vertical grip.

The GFX 100 II is a replacement for the original GFX 100, but Fujifilm says the GFX 100S will still continue to be sold as a more affordable option.

PANASONIC UNVEILS LUMIX G9 II WITH PHASE-DETECT AF

Long-awaited G9 successor is a powerful option for sports and wildlife shooters

After months of rumors and speculation, Panasonic has announced the Lumix G9 II, the successor to its flagship G9 Micro Four Thirds (MFT) camera. While that camera was primarily aimed at photographers, the Lumix G9 II is very much aimed at hybrid content creators who care as much about video as they do about stills.

© Panasonic

Key features

The headline feature of the Lumix G9 II is its upgraded autofocus system, which debuted on the Panasonic Lumix S5 II to wide acclaim, and it's great to see this system appearing in more cameras in Panasonic's range.

The new AF facilitates not only faster and more accurate focus, using a 779-point phase-detection system – the first such system in a Lumix camera – but also enables even more advanced subject recognition and tracking, which can now effectively track humans and animals, including eyes, as well as cars and motorcycles. It isn't quite the extensive range of subjects that other brands' systems can recognise, but the available options certainly cover the key areas for the majority of photographers.

Inside the camera, the newly designed 25.2MP Live MOS MFT sensor is paired with a brand-new processing engine, and when the high-resolution Pixel Shift mode is employed the G9 II can be boosted to produce 100MP images handheld. The camera has an ISO rating of 100-25,600.

The Lumix G9 II has an impressive maximum burst speed of 60fps with continuous autofocus, which can go up to 75fps without autofocus. Both of these figures are achieved using the

electronic shutter, with the G9 II having a much more pedestrian 14fps (AF-S) or 10fps (AF-C) when you're using the mechanical shutter.

The G9 II also has a pre-burst mode, which can be set for 1.5, 1, or 0.5 seconds before the shutter is fully depressed, so your slow trigger finger doesn't miss any of the action – which is especially useful for sports and wildlife photography, key areas that this MFT camera is targeting.

The Lumix G9 II is compatible with the extensive range of Micro Four Thirds lenses from Panasonic, OM System (Olympus), Leica, and other brands, which gives you a comprehensive arsenal of lenses to choose from for just about any shooting situation you can imagine.

Panasonic has also made big improvements to its image stabilisation system, which now offers up to eight stops of in-body stabilisation (or BIS, to use Lumix branding), although this is slightly reduced to 7.5 stops when using lenses over 60mm in length. There's also advanced Active IS for additional stabilisation for heavier movement, like walking or panning.

© Panasonic

Video

The Lumix G9 II also boasts new video features, with 5.7K 60p, 4K 120p or Full HD 240p max video resolutions, and can record using the full sensor in 4:2:0 10-bit, offering up to 13 stops of dynamic range when shooting in V-Log.

You can also record in Apple ProRes, as well as directly to an external SSD. Like the S5 II, you can create and install your own real-time LUTs on the camera and apply them to photos or video, or you can use one of the 19 that are pre-made for the G9 II, as well as photo styles like the new Leica Monochrome.

The body has been refined from the original Panasonic Lumix G9, doing away with the curves of that model to have a flatter top that's essentially a copy of last year's Lumix S5 II. The top screen has been nixed, and replaced with a separate function dial from the last model's dual-purpose dial, but otherwise the layout remains familiar territory to existing Panasonic shooters. On the rear there's a 3-inch 1,080k-dot articulating screen, and up top a 3,680k-dot electronic viewfinder. The Lumix G9 II will use the Panasonic DMW-BLK22E battery, and be sold alongside a new battery grip, the Panasonic DMW-BG1, which is also compatible with the Lumix S5 II.

© Panasonic

Pricing and availability

The Panasonic Lumix G9 II will be available in late November starting at £1,699 / $1,899 for the body only. The G9 II will also be sold in two kits in the UK, one with the Panasonic 12-60mm f/3.5-5.6 ASPH Power OIS for £1,899, and the other with the Leica DG Vario-Elmarit 12-60mm f/2.8-4.0 ASPH for £2,249.

THE PRO
GARY JONES
CAMERA: NIKON Z 9

Gary resides near the Snowdonia National Park in North Wales. He's been enamoured with animals and photography since he was young, and while he's travelled all over the world photographing wildlife, perhaps his biggest passion is raptors. When he's not following wildlife subjects to far-flung places – and even scaling mountains – he runs a busy workshop schedule, and regularly presents at camera clubs across the UK. Find out more at:
www.gjwp.co.uk

RAPTOR CAPTURE

A keen wildlife photographer goes in search of kites and other birds of prey with pro Gary Jones

THE APPRENTICE
REBECCA ELLIOTT
CAMERA: NIKON Z 8

Becky works as a legal translator, but she's also fluent in photography. She caught the bug at just 14, learning the ropes using a selection of camera books her dad bought her. It's been her main hobby ever since, but it wasn't until a trip to Canada in 2008 that she decided to pick up her first decent digital camera. She then migrated to the Nikon Z 50, before spiralling down the Z-Series rabbit hole with incremental upgrades in the form of a Z 6II, followed by a shiny new Z 8.

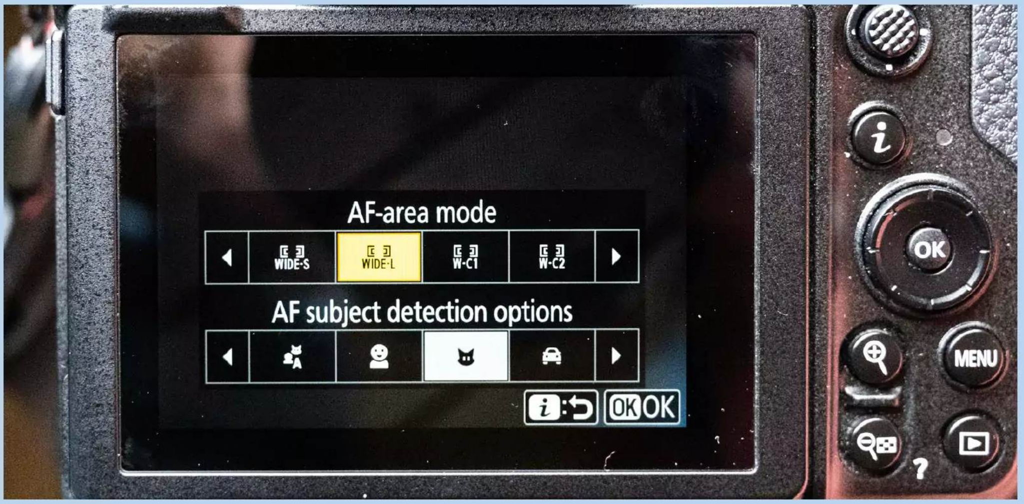
FEATURE

TECHNIQUE ASSESSMENT

Gary began the day by showing Rebecca how to set up her camera to help her capture top bird shots

RING-A-DING-DING

Gary says… I almost always use Manual mode, but I like to pair it with Auto ISO; I can then use Exposure Compensation to quickly control my exposure. This is made more effective by assigning the function to my 100-400mm's control ring, so that I can alter Exp Comp with a flick of the wrist.



WIDEN THE FIELD

Gary says… AF-C is a given, but I like to set my AF-area mode to Wide-S or Wide-L (on Nikon cameras), depending on the subject – I use Wide-L the most. I set AF subject detection to Animal Detection, and I can then move the box around like a single focus point, but if the bird moves out of it, the camera will track it.

BLOCKED SHOT

Gary says… The 'Focus tracking with lock-on' custom setting's 'Blocked shot AF response' is how long the camera waits to refocus if an object comes between you and your subject. If I'm shooting in a forest with obstacles, I'll increase the delay. Birds are erratic, so I set 'Subject motion' accordingly.

CAMERA Nikon Z 8 **LENS** 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6
EXPOSURE 1/2500 sec, f/5, ISO560

The reintroduction of red kites in England and Scotland is one of the UK's most remarkable conservation success stories. Go back roughly three decades and this magnificent bird of prey had been reduced to a dangerously small population in Wales. While the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) notes that the species was a 'valued' asset in medieval Britain, it highlights the 16th century as the turning point; the raptor was considered 'vermin', and hunted until the early 20th century, ultimately being driven to extinction in England and Scotland. Today, following a reintroduction programme in 1989, red kites have been brought back from the brink, to the point where they're now becoming an increasingly frequent sight beyond their Welsh stronghold; however, central Wales, dubbed 'red kite country', is still the best place to witness these majestic birds of prey.

And there's perhaps nowhere better to see them up close than the red kite feeding station at Gigrin Farm (www.gigrin.co.uk).This 160-acre site is situated near Rhayader, in the heart of Powys, a county that proudly bears the silhouette of a red kite on its logo. The wild birds are fed daily in a wild staging area, flanked by a terrace of permanent hides. Gigrin has become a haven for wildlife photographers, who are catered for with several specialist photo hides.

The centrally positioned Gateway Hide would be Becky and Gary's base for the duration of the shoot. And even before the food had been spread across the staging area, the kites were circling.

Hide and seek

"There's a lot up there already," said Becky as she wiped the front element of her Z 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 VR S with a lens cloth. "Does it always draw a crowd?"

"It can vary depending on the weather," said Gary. "Heavy rain brings worms to the surface, and sometimes you get fewer kites because they're feeding

EXPERT INSIGHT
A NICE, CLEAN FLIGHT

Gary says... Try to photograph subjects against a clean background. This will make them 'pop', since there's nothing to detract the viewer's attention. A good method is to sight a bird in the sky and track it until it passes against a clean background, like a bank of trees. A long focal length and a wide aperture will then blur the backdrop into obscurity.

CAMERA Nikon Z 8
LENS 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6
EXPOSURE 1/2500 sec, f/5.3, ISO2800

EXPERT INSIGHT
BIRDS BEHAVING BADLY

Gary says... Once you've mastered the techniques required to consistently capture sharp shots of birds in flight, you can focus your attention on what you're capturing. To build up a well-rounded portfolio of any species, you'll need to capture a variety of behaviours. Even during this one scenario, Becky was able to capture a well-rounded selection of images: birds eating on the wing, scrapping mid-flight, strafing the ground for food. Burst shooting helps too, ensuring that you don't miss something good, and allowing you to choose the best image from a sequence.

elsewhere. Usually, when the food is first put out it's a great free-for-all." With his tripod set up, the pro began to attach a gimbal head. "The better shots are when they thin out, after the initial feeding frenzy," he said. "For one, it's easier to track a bird, and then you have a much better chance of capturing an individual or pair against a clean background.

"We'll see some buzzards as well; they spend a lot of time on the ground. The kites won't attack them, but they will swoop past them to pick up food. I'll often hover around a buzzard, knowing that a kite might swoop down near it at any moment.

"And if we're really lucky, we might see a rare, leucistic red kite."

"What are they?" asked Becky.

"Kites with leucism, which reduces the pigmentation in their plumage, making them look very pale or near-white."

Gary attached the Nikon AF-S 500mm f/4E FL ED VR to his gimbal and secured his Z 9 onto its mount, and attached the same 100-400mm as Becky's to a second Z 9 for handheld shooting. "I use that lens a lot," he said. "I like to shoot in Manual mode with Auto ISO. I then assign exposure compensation to the lens's control ring."

At that moment a tractor rumbled onto the staging area, pulling a bucket laden with scraps of meat. The driver left the cab and began shovelling the meat out onto the field, spreading it far and wide.

As more kites arrived, a few brazen birds swooped down to pick up the first morsels. "It's about to get very crowded," said Gary. "This is the point where I find it's best to stand off the camera and let the birds thin out for a few minutes. This might be the perfect time to go through your shooting settings."

Becky was already used to Gary's preferred Manual mode, but switched to Auto ISO and set up her control ring accordingly to match his setup. She then set her AF-area mode to Wide-L and the AF subject detection option to Animal Detection. Gary held up his Z 9 and pointed at one of the Fn buttons on the front: "I also like to set a function button to single-point AF, so that I can switch to it at will, should a particularly busy scene cause

A 100-400mm lens provides enough reach to sight faraway subjects, and a versatile zoom range

Animal Detection to struggle."

Becky's first task was to capture a conventional portrait of a bird in flight and, with the initial brawl for food having subsided, she started picking out subjects.

"Pick a bird in the sky and track it as it swoops down," said Gary. "Once it flies past a clean backdrop, fire the shutter." Becky was having no trouble using Gary's AF setup, and was already capturing sharp portraits of kites on the wing.

"Try lingering on a buzzard for a while," said Gary. "They feed on the ground, but one will take off eventually." Sure enough, after a few minutes of sighting a buzzard, it spread its wings and took flight. Becky locked onto the big bird of prey and captured two images. Hot Shot #1 would be a frame-filling, head-on image of the buzzard with its wings spread wide.

In-flight catering

"That was a great shot," said Gary. "But as we aim for more elusive moments, I'd aim to capture a longer sequence. The beauty of the Z 8/9's 20fps burst mode is that you get a second, third, fourth, fifth chance to select the sharpest image in a sequence, or the one with the perfect wing position, for example. This time, try to capture a kite with a piece of meat in its beak or talons."

"I'm shooting at 1/2500 sec," said Becky. "Would you be happy with that?"

"With kites, it's as fast as you can get it," Gary replied. "Obviously ISO is the trade-off. Some people try to stay below ISO1000, but with current pro-level cameras I think you can hit around ISO2500 and not be worried."

Becky nodded before stepping up to the hide's opening and sighting another subject through her Nikon Z 8's EVF. Capturing a feeding bird wasn't easy; if she waited for one to snatch a piece of meat, there was barely enough time to react, let alone track it as it flew away. She remembered Gary's advice to follow a circling kite in the sky and hope it would soon make a strafing run.

"It's been theorized that there's a hierarchy, and the dominant birds feed first," said Gary. "But I don't know how true that is. With that in mind, I'd stick with a bird for a while, and if it doesn't swoop down to feed within a minute or two, move on."

Becky had locked focus on a kite that was moving through the sky at pace – finger pressed down on the back button to maintain constant focus. Suddenly, it dived. Becky tracked it as far as the tree line, but

HOW TO: EDIT BIRDS OF PREY

1

MASK YOUR SUBJECT

Gary says... Lightroom's Select Subject feature within the Masking tool is really powerful. At the click of a button, it gives you the ability to process your subject without affecting the rest of the image. It worked well for this bird-in-flight image, in which there were dark shadows beneath the wings.

2

HSL/COLOR PANEL

Gary says... Many wildlife images are set against a background dominated by green foliage, and sometimes this can look over-saturated. Rather than reduce the overall saturation with the Saturation slider, I like to target only the green tones, by using the Green Saturation slider in the HSL/ Color panel.

3

GLINT IN THE EYE

Gary says... For close-up bird portraits, it's essential that the eye is pin-sharp, with a beautiful catchlight. You can enhance this by clicking on the Masking tool and selecting Brush. Paint a mask over the eye, and then tweak the Clarity slider accordingly to add punch.

CAMERA Nikon Z 8
LENS 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6
EXPOSURE 1/2500 sec, f/5.6, ISO560

let out a frustrated sigh: "I lost it," she said, "they're really quick."

Gary glanced at the 100-400mm's barrel: "You're maxed out at 400mm," he noted. "Try zooming out to 300mm to give yourself a little breathing room by allowing the bird a little more space to move within the frame. An upside of that massive 45.7MP sensor is the ability to crop heavily in post if needed."

This did the trick. The next time Becky tracked a kite to the ground, she was able to keep up with it through the viewfinder. "It's got something," she said as she followed it back up to the treeline. With a clean background and a side-on angle that clearly revealed the morsel hanging from the bird's beak, she fired a burst and captured Hot Shot #2.

Flight club

Capturing a bird in flight is often considered one of the hardest techniques to conquer in photography, but Becky was having no trouble capturing sharp shot after sharp shot. "You decide what behaviour you want to capture this time, and keep an eye out for that leucistic kite," said Gary with a light-hearted grin.

"Capturing a pair of birds would be nice," said Becky. "Which reminds me, what are your thoughts on aperture?"

"Usually, as wide as I can get," Gary replied. "But if you're trying to capture two birds on different focal planes, you could stop down to f/8 if the light is bright enough. You've been hovering around f/5, which is a good middle ground if you want a little bit of extra play when focusing, while keeping your shutter speed suitably quick."

As Becky continued taking photos, Gary noted the wind direction: "It's blowing to our right and slightly behind so the birds are flying across and towards us, which is ideal as they fly into the wind."

"It's definitely easier with fewer birds in the sky," said Becky as she tracked a kite.

Gary pointed to a neighbouring hide: "Most people have left now, but this is the best time to photograph them. It's definitely... there. Did you get that Becky?"

In a blink-and-you'll miss it moment, a kite and buzzard had a coming together, with the latter spinning partially in midair. "I did. I was tracking that kite," said Becky as she showed the pro the image on the Playback screen. The 20fps burst helped her capture the exact moment the birds passed each other on nearly the same

EXPERT INSIGHT
TAG, YOU'RE IT!

Gary says... I don't avoid or clone out bird rings. When I photograph a ringed osprey, I'll pop onto social media and research its story. I once discovered an individual had been ringed two years prior – just a couple of miles down the road from where I'd photographed it. This was likely the first time in its adult life it had returned to the UK.

CAMERA Nikon Z 8
LENS 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6
EXPOSURE 1/1600, f/5.3, ISO560

focal plane. "Fantastic," said Gary. "Not sure how we can top that – that's Hot Shot #3."

The Ghost of Gigrin

Gigrin Farm had one more surprise in store for the pair of photographers as their allotted time in the hide was drawing to an end. Becky was still searching for her final Hot Shot, while Gary was taking a few photos from his gimbal. Suddenly, he pointed towards a copse at the far end of the staging area: "There! A leucistic kite."

Becky momentarily looked up from her Z 8's EVF in a bid to zero in on the elusive bird, but lost it in the diffused white of the overcast sky. "I'm sure it'll come around again," said Gary. "We want to really show off its plumage, so try photographing it in front of those dark trees. Dial in a little negative exposure compensation to make the background really dark. You'll end up with a low-key effect that will help to make the kite stand out."

Becky dialled in a couple stops of negative exposure compensation and scanned the sky, while Gary searched through his binoculars.

"It's by the trees," he said. Becky located the bird before looking through her EVF. She zoomed out to the wide end, which provided a little play when locating the kite, before zooming in further.

"I've got it," she announced as she tracked the soaring raptor. "Hopefully, it'll make another pass or two," said Gary as Becky followed her subject up into the sky.

This time, she managed to keep up with her target, even as it briefly flew out of sight over the hide. When it emerged again, from the left-hand side, she was waiting to track it back past the trees. Slowly letting out an intake of breath, Becky calmly held down the shutter button and captured a sharp sequence. Remarkably, Hot Shot #4 was the elusive leucistic red kite.

EXPERT INSIGHT
FLIGHT SCHOOL

Gary says... You have to react quickly when photographing birds in flight. Learn to adjust your settings without taking your eye from the viewfinder, because the moment you look down you'll miss something. It's muscle memory: when you get a new camera, put the hours in so that using it becomes second nature. Spend hours photographing garden birds, pigeons or gulls if you have to.

BECKY'S COMMENT

Using Gary's AF settings was a game changer. When I was confident with focusing, I could worry about the subject and composition, which made all the difference when I had only a few tries to capture the white kite.

GARY'S VERDICT

Once Becky's Z 8 was set up, she was unstoppable, and there were so many great shots to choose from. The feeding couldn't have gone better: good weather, plenty of birds and that stunning leucistic kite.

ESSENTIAL GEAR

GIMBAL HEAD

Gary says... When you're using a big lens like my Nikon AF-S 500mm f/4E FL ED VR, hand-holding isn't really an option. Using a standard tripod head is fine if your subject isn't moving much or you've framed your composition, pre-focused and are waiting to fire the shutter, but if you're photographing fast-moving subjects like birds in flight, a gimbal head provides the best of both worlds: stability and freedom of movement.

PRO PORTFOLIO GARY JONES

EAGLE-EYED ATTACK
This encounter left me amazed at the lengths birds will go to protect their young. The golden eagle was happily feeding, but a pair of jays – nesting close by – kept dive-bombing it. The action was incredibly fast, and it became evident, upon reviewing the images, that the jays were actually targeting the eagle's eyes.

ROMEO THE PUFFIN
I was watching a big group of puffins on Skomer Island when this guy flew in with a flower in his mouth and duly paraded it around the group. We were convinced he was looking for a mate, and was trying the flower approach, so we named him Romeo. We never did see if it worked!

SEA EAGLES FIGHTING
I love images of raptor behaviour. I was lucky enough to witness two white-tailed eagles come together, high over a loch, in a territorial dispute. The action was fast and noisy; my main concern was keeping both birds in focus, and using a fast shutter speed to freeze the action.

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XPOSURE

THE WEEK'S MOST INSPIRING READER PHOTOS

CHIPMUNK

BARB D'ARPINO

"Sometimes you have to look at life from a different perspective. An always-entertaining Eastern chipmunk hangs upside down to get every last kernel of corn from the cob. Taken at Wasaga Beach, Ontario, Canada."

https://bit.ly/44HqL0t

DANS LE PASSÉ DE LA CROIX

KEVIN CARDET AND MANON

"Towards another time, beckoning us to a different era.
Taken in a church in France's Loir-et-Cher region."

https://bit.ly/3Liph66

THE VIEW FROM THE ARC

MARIO OTTAVIANI

"I took this photo at Mandello del Lario, a lovely town on Lake Como in northern Italy. It's famous for being the home of the Moto Guzzi motorcycle factory."

https://bit.ly/3Akm016

DESOLATE ABERFFRAW BEACH

JEFF GUILE

"This was taken on a very breezy day at Aberffraw beach on Anglesey in North Wales. I was taken by the desolation on the beach, the two pieces of grass on the left, and the bright-red life buoy, which I thought would look good in the centre of the image, with the mountains of the Llyn Peninsular in the distance."
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INSPIRATION

IT'S COOL, THAT

THE BEST THING WE'VE SEEN THIS WEEK

Last Rain by Krzysztof Krawczyk, Highly commended, Wedding

White Beauty by Lurdes Santander, 1st place, Animals/Pets

Spotless Elegance by Cheraine Collette, 1st place, Advertising

Spirit of the Universe by Peter Lik, 1st place, Nature & Landscape

Images © The photographer and courtesy Siena Creative Photo Awards

ARTISTRY UNLEASHED IN THE PHOTO CONTEST WITH NO RULES

Siena Creative Photo Awards announces eclectic collection of winning images

The Siena Creative Photo Awards is a photography competition with a difference. The Awards, which are part of the Siena Awards, an international festival of visual arts based in the city of Siena in Italy, were conceived as a global platform for artistic photography, and unlike most contests there are no rules on post-production work; on the contrary, it's positively encouraged, and the results are by turns striking, beautiful and bizarre – and in some cases all three at once.

As the contest website explains: "In this competition, everyone is free to use any technique. Only the final effect counts. We break all the rules, and we want you to break them with us by creating new trends in art." We can certainly get on board with that.

Click the link to see all the winning and commended images from this year's competition. The images will also be exhibited during the Siena Awards Photo Festival, which takes place in the city from September 30 to November 19.

SEE MORE IMAGES
https://bit.ly/3PkM1Ug

YOU'VE BEEN FRAMED

Mike Harris uses a couple of creative compositional techniques to add interest to an outdoor portrait

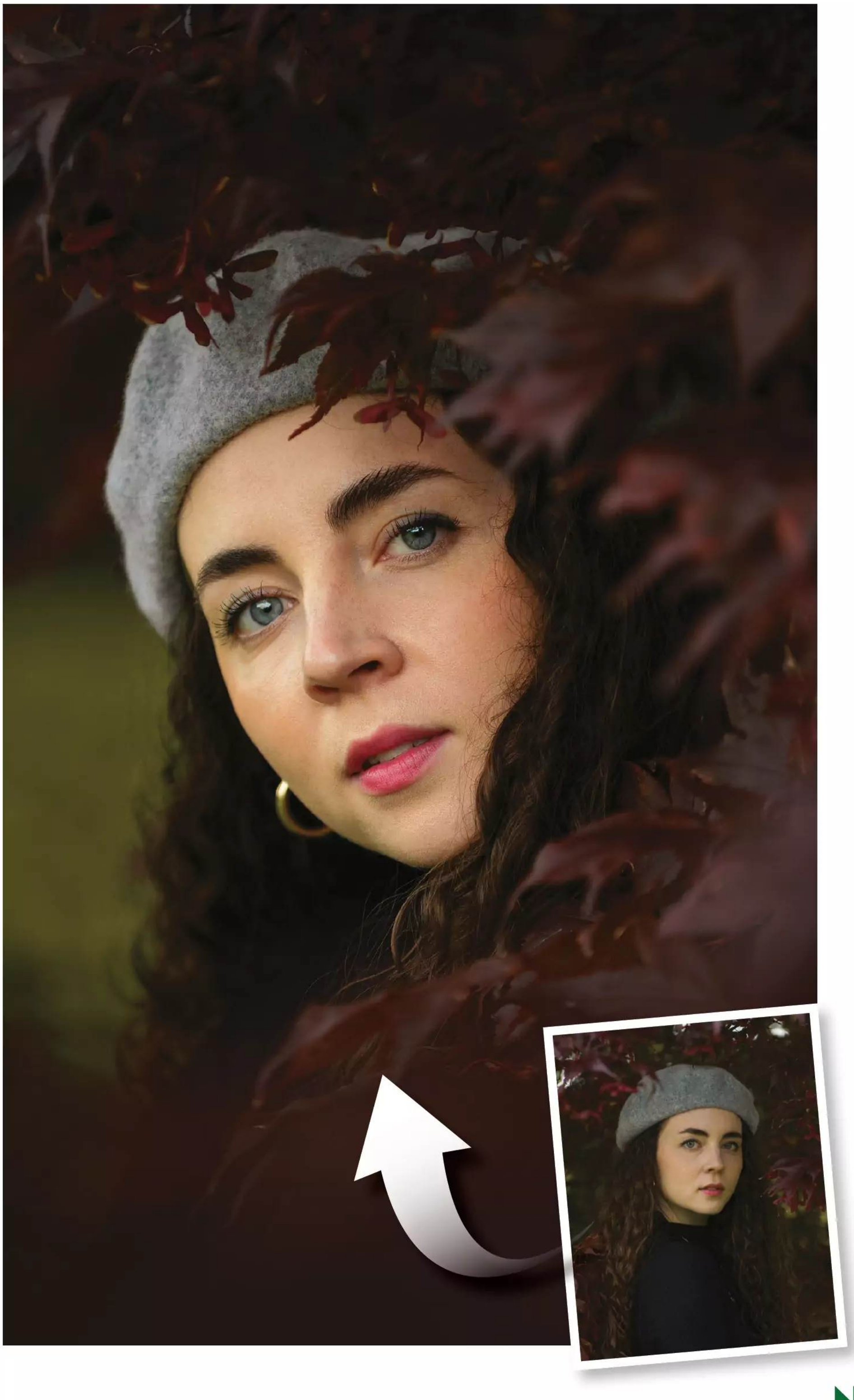
20 MINS

You don't need loads of kit to shoot outdoor portraits – in fact, you could complete this project with just your DSLR or mirrorless camera and a kit lens. In this tutorial we're going back to basics, looking at two simple compositional techniques that can be used to inject additional interest into outdoor portraits: composing a frame within a frame, and including foreground interest.

There's plenty to think about when you're shooting a portrait: the light needs to be flattering, the eyes need to be in focus, and the subject's facial expression has to be appropriate. When you're trying to capture the perfect catchlight composition might become something of an afterthought. But as the two images on the right illustrate, how you choose to compose a portrait can make a big difference to the result.

Our shoot took place in front of a maroon-coloured tree, with thick cloud cover acted as a diffuser and producing flattering light on the subject's face. However, when we positioned her directly in front of the dark maroon leaves, we were struggling to create a sense of depth. Our solution was to gently nudge a group of leaves into the frame, just centimetres from our lens. A relatively wide aperture of f/3.2, the leaves caused the leaves to fade into a pleasing foreground blur, which added another layer to the image and greatly increased the sense of depth.

The rest of the surrounding leaves then blended into the model's dark hair and framed her face. This 'frame within a frame' contrasts the subject's evenly lit face, and helps to draw the viewer's gaze. Here's how we did it…



HOW TO ADD INTEREST TO AN OUTDOOR PORTRAIT

1

FIND YOUR INTEREST

Think about where you want to shoot your portrait. Foliage is ideal for framing your subject and providing foreground interest, as you can place your model within the vegetation. Foliage can also be gently moved, giving you that little bit more control over your framing.

2

DON'T DISTORT

Prime lenses are favoured by portrait photographers for their tack-sharp results, but you can still take great portraits with zoom or kit lenses. Focal length is the most important consideration: we used an 24-70mm f/2.8 lens, and shot at 70mm to mimimise unflattering barrel distortion.

3

VR SETTINGS

If your lens features image stabilisation technology, think carefully about how you use it before activating it. Our lens features both Normal and Active modes – the latter is designed to mitigate the vibrations of a moving vehicle, so if you have similar options set your stabilisation to its standard mode.

QUICK TIP

Back-button focusing is when you assign autofocus exclusively to a button such as AF-ON, enabling you to press the shutter button without the camera refocusing or hunting, and it's especially useful when locking focus and reframing. You can even lock focus when using AF-C, by simply releasing the AF-ON button.

HOW TO ADD INTEREST TO AN OUTDOOR PORTRAIT

4

CAMERA SETTINGS

Use a wide aperture to produce a shallow depth of field and blur the foreground detail. We shot during a light breeze, and used a shutter speed of 1/320 sec to ensure the leaves were frozen still. ISO320 allowed us to achieve the correct exposure without any noticeable loss of quality.

5

FRAMING

You'll need to position your model and compose your shot carefully in order to achieve your frame within a frame effect. However, you can cheat when it comes to foreground interest by gently guiding a few leaves in front of your lens with your hand, giving you additional control over the framing.

6

FOCUS ON THE CLOSEST EYE

The focal point of a portrait is the subject's eyes. Pay particular attention to the eye that's closest to the camera, and ensure it's sharp. Use Single Point AF and Single AF mode to precisely target the eye, and half-press the shutter button to engage focus lock. By keeping the shutter half-pressed you can then adjust your frame while maintaining focus on the eye.

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HOW TO...

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Mike Harris shows you how to create a focus-stacked close-up that's sharp from front to back

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It's hard to go far wrong when you're capturing close-up images with a macro lens. The super-shallow depths of field, and the otherworldly shapes and textures seen at high magnification, can make almost any subject look good. However, macro lenses can also create a challenge for anyone wanting to capture a close-up subject that's entirely in focus.

This is especially the case when you're photographing plants like the thistle above. In our 'before' image, you can see that the front of the seed is in focus, but the leaves around it are completely blurred. That's because macro lenses produce depths of field that are too shallow to provide sufficient focus, even at narrow apertures. Unless a subject has very little depth – for example if you're shooting down onto a flat flower head – you'll struggle to get all of it sharp.

The solution is focus-stacking. As you'll discover in this issue's video tutorial, this clever technique involves capturing multiple images with identical framing, but different planes of focus. The images are then blended in software to create the desired depth of field. If it's done well, a sequence of images will cover every point of focus, so the whole subject is sharp.

MIRRORLESS TEST

EXPERT OPINION ON THE LATEST KIT

SONY A6700

Taking on all challengers, Sony is back with a new crop-frame champion to try to reclaim the APS-C throne

www.sony.co.uk £1,449/$1,399 (body only)

When Sony released its first APS-C crop-sensor mirrorless camera back in 2013, the company hit on something good. Combining the new Sony E-Mount for smaller and lighter mirrorless lenses with a light and compact camera body, Sony's A6x00 range became successful with travellers, weekend photographers and content creators as the compact hybrid camera to beat.

The Sony A6600 has sat at the top of the range since 2019, but over the past few years Sony has made a lot of technical developments that it's rapidly rolling out to new camera models. Fans of Sony's A6x00 range have, understandably, been clamouring for Sony to update the lineup, and the company has finally answered those calls with the A6700.

However, since the Sony A6600's release, Sony just can't seem to stop launching similar cameras – in the past few months, we've already had the Sony ZV-E1 and the Sony ZV-1 II. Sony's ZV cameras are aimed at video-focused content creators, although they are capable of taking quality stills. Apart from lacking an electronic viewfinder, ZV cameras share much of the same design and technology as the A6x00 range. For example, the ZV-E10 is a compact interchangeable lens APS-C camera with a 24.1MP sensor and great 4K video, for much less than an A6600.

With ZV cameras closing ground, does the A6x00 range still have a future? Sony clearly believes there's space in the market for both. However, the A6600 is a tough act to follow, and with plenty of new competition out there, how does the A6700 hold up?

Key features

The Sony A6700 features a 26MP APS-C back-side illuminated (BSI) CMOS sensor from Sony's Exmor R range, capable of ISO 100-32,000 (80-102,400 extended), and supported by five-axis in-body image stabilisation (IBIS) that offers up to five stops of shake correction.

Trickling down from Sony's high-end Sony A7R V, the A6700 also uses the combination of Sony's latest Bionz XR processor and separate AI chip for autofocus and image processing, allowing for speeds of 11 frames per second with a buffer of 1,000 JPEGs or 59 raw photos at full resolution with continuous autofocus.

Autofocus now includes all of the newest subject-recognition and tracking categories from the latest Sony cameras, including the ability to track human bodies, heads,

1 The grip is surprisingly deep and moulded for a compact camera, and comfortable enough to hold one-handed.

2 The APS-C crop-sensor format combines Sony's E-Mount lenses with a light and compact camera body.

3 Sony's crop-frame sensor applies an approximate 1.5x magnification to the effective focal length.

4 The viewfinder feels rather dated, and is low-resolution by today's standards.

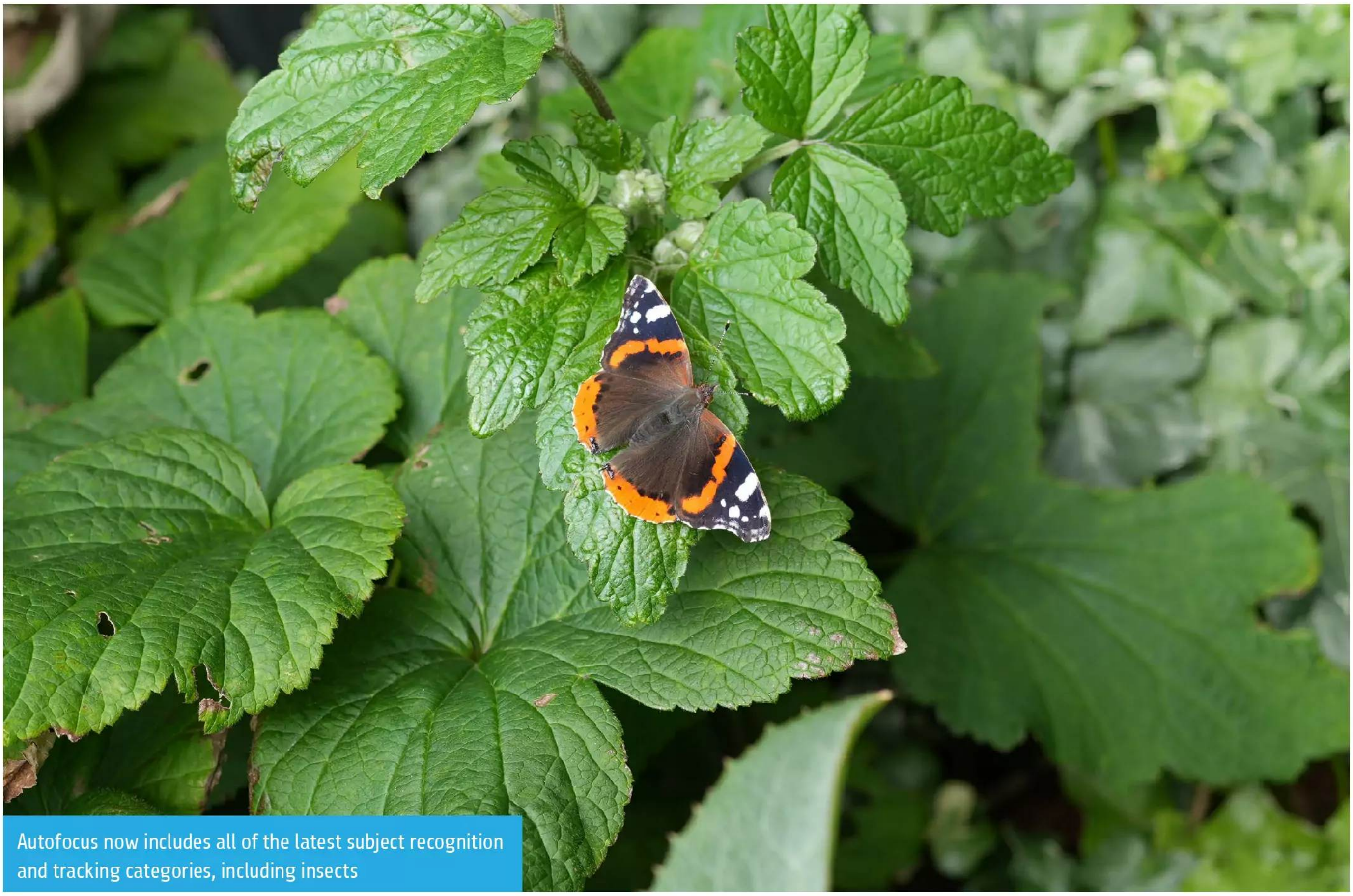
5 The LCD is a fully articulated vari-angle, useful for shooting at awkward angles.

6 A dial has been added under the main mode selection dial for switching between modes.

7 The A6700 uses the same rechargeable battery pack as the A6600 and has a 550-shot capacity.

8 Sony's latest Bionz XR processor with a separate AI chip allows for speeds of 11 frames per second.

9 Three doors on the left side reveal headphone sockets, USB-C, mini-HDMI and an SD card slot.



Autofocus now includes all of the latest subject recognition and tracking categories, including insects

© Gareth Bevan

faces and eyes, as well as vehicles, animals, birds and insects. Sony claims autofocus performance is now 20% more reliable than the previous generation. The A6700 has almost twice the number of phase-detection autofocus points, clocking in at 759 points that cover 93% of the frame, and it can focus in up to -3 EV.

This is a hybrid camera, and the video specs are similarly improved from the previous generation. The Sony A6700 offers Super 35 6K oversampled video, and can record in 4K up to 120fps or 240fps in Full HD, which is 10x slowed footage. Video can be recorded internally with 14+ stops of range in 10-bit 4:2:2 in S-Log and S-Cinetone, and LUTs can be applied in-camera. However, the camera can't record in raw or ProRes via HDMI output.

There's still a 2.36m-dot electronic viewfinder (EVF) with a 1.07x magnification and up to 120fps. Sony claims it's made the EVF brighter and more pleasant to use than the last generation. The A6700 now also benefits from a side-flip touchscreen, rather than the flip-up screen that was on the previous generation, which will suit videographers much better.

Build and handling

The Sony A6700 keeps the compact build that is a hallmark of the series. The A6700's viewfinder is still in the left corner in a rangefinder design, which isn't to everyone's tastes, but it means the camera can be short and boxy without the usual viewfinder hump. The A6700 has a chunky appearance but, overall, it looks and feels as though it means business.

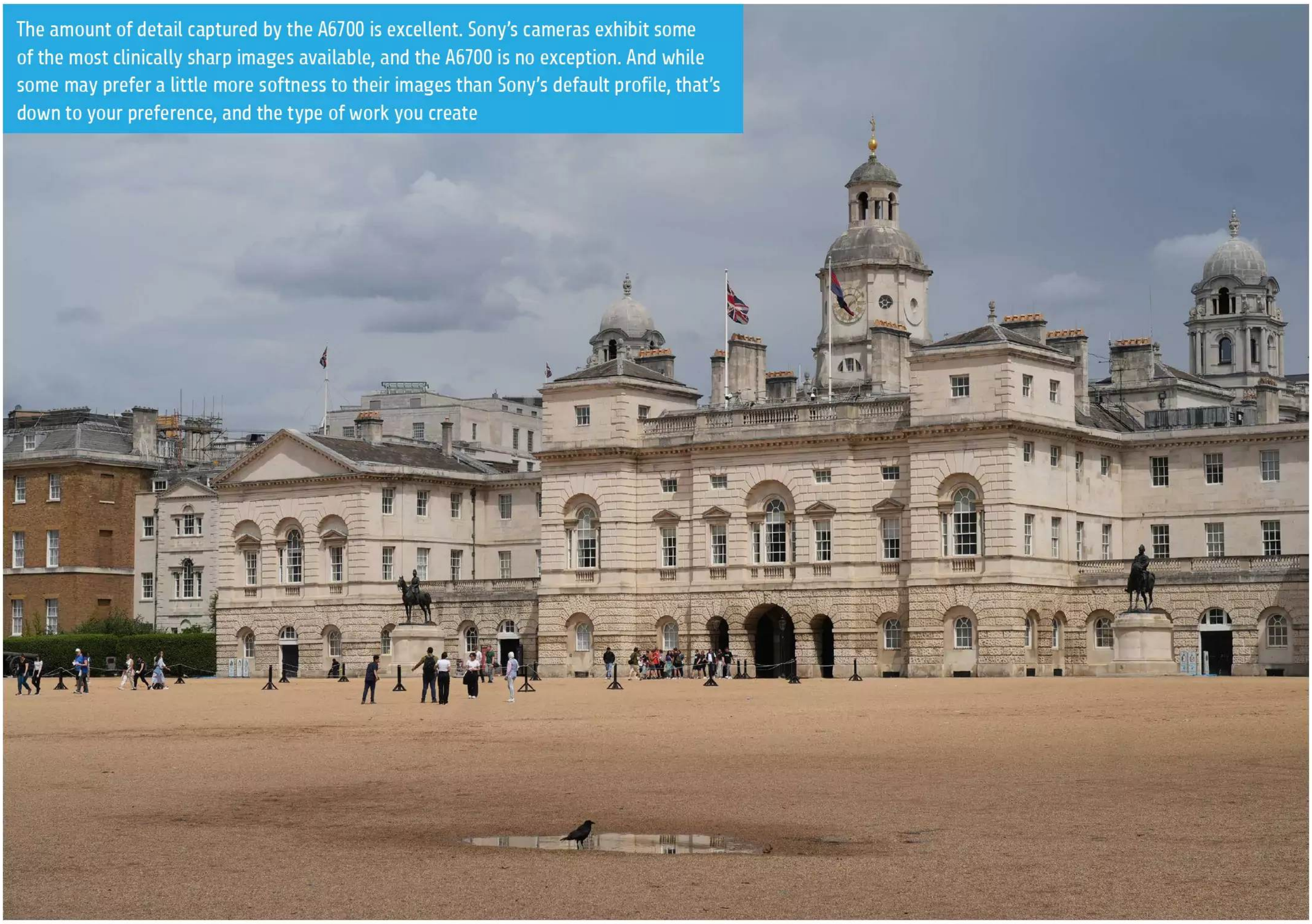
The grip is surprisingly deep and moulded for a compact camera. It's comfortable enough that I was able to use the back buttons with my thumb one-handed without feeling like the camera was going to slip from my grip.

The A6700 has microphone and headphone sockets, USB-C, mini-HDMI and an SD card slot, all hidden behind three separate doors on the left side of the camera. These doors look more aesthetically pleasing than rubber flaps, but are trickier and more delicate to open. The SD card slot isn't in the battery compartment, which is a relief for someone who uses tripods and gimbals much of the time.

Though the buttons and layout will be familiar to Sony shooters, there are some new additions. Sony has added a secondary dial under the main mode selection dial for switching between photo, video, and S&Q modes. This is easier to use without looking than the switches on Sony's ZV lineup, as you can flick it with your thumb without adjusting your grip.

There's now a larger dedicated video record button on the top of the camera rather than on the side, to switch to video at any time, which is much easier and more natural to use. The AF-MF/AEL switch from the

The amount of detail captured by the A6700 is excellent. Sony's cameras exhibit some of the most clinically sharp images available, and the A6700 is no exception. And while some may prefer a little more softness to their images than Sony's default profile, that's down to your preference, and the type of work you create



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A6600 has also been replaced with an AF-ON button – how big a deal this is will depend on how you shoot. Possibly my favourite improvement from the previous generation is the screen. The A6700 now has a fully articulated vari-angle screen instead of the flip-up one on the A6600. This is much easier for shooting awkward angles or recording selfies or vlogs. Some street photographers like a flip-up screen so they can shoot from the hip, but the vari-angle screen is more versatile.

The only real negative with the Sony A6700's build is its viewfinder. For a new camera at this price, it feels dated. The viewfinder's resolution is poor by modern standards – even after playing with the settings, it's quite dark, and there is considerable flickering in highlights. Though it's usable, it isn't a particularly pleasant experience, and I found myself defaulting to the screen for shooting.

The viewfinder has always felt like an afterthought on the A6x00 range, especially as it starts to feel more indistinguishable from Sony's ZV lineup. Without a good viewfinder, it is harder to pinpoint the reason for the A6700 to exist outside the ZV range.

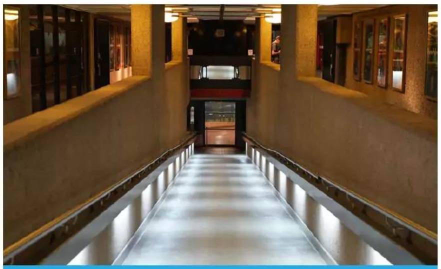
Performance

The A6700's 26MP sensor might look tame compared with the 40MP sensor in the Fujifilm X-T5 or the 64MP sensor in Sony's own A7R V, but it's more than enough resolution to use across the web, social media or medium-sized prints, and still competes with rival cameras at this price point.

Image detail from the A6700 is excellent. Sony's cameras produce some of the most clinically sharp photos available, and the A6700 is no exception. I prefer a little more softness to my images than Sony's default profile, but that's down to your preference. and the work you create.

Colours are accurate, but have a richness and vibrancy that makes them pop without looking unnatural. The A6700 managed to produce an accurate, and importantly, consistent white balance between photos, even in changeable weather and lighting. I also like the skin tones that Sony cameras reproduce, which veer towards slightly warmer tones and an increased saturation that makes subjects look healthy and vibrant.

As the A6700 now uses the already acclaimed Bionz XR and AI Chip, you can expect the autofocus to be incredibly fast and accurate. For static subjects, the A6700 locked onto subjects at 'blink and you'll miss it' speed – at this point it's hard to see how standard point autofocus can get perceptively faster. Where the A6700 now shines is in its AI



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For static subjects, the A6700 locks on at a 'blink and you'll miss it' speed. In fact, it's difficult to see how standard point autofocus could get perceptibly faster

recognition and tracking capabilities for humans, as well as for various animals, birds, vehicles, and now insects. I couldn't find an abundance of insects, but the animal- and bird-tracking worked to perfection on the limited domestic animals I could find in London. The camera even tracked some foxes skulking around my garden in near darkness.

Sony's human- and face-tracking is some of the best around. The A6700 can recognise human bodies and heads, as well as faces and eyes, and it had no issues tracking my subject around the frame, keeping eyes in focus in every shot – even deliberate erratic movements couldn't throw the focus off. I got a good hit rate for burst shooting for full subjects, and while it couldn't nail the focus on small details every time, the number of usable shots was impressive.

Video

Given Sony's focus on video, it comes as no surprise that the A6700's video performance is excellent. The 4K video is impressively sharp, rich and detailed in standard outputs. If you have no intention of digging into codecs or LUTs then you don't need to, as the standard footage from the A6700 is good enough until you want to get creative. The A6700 has several preset styles to choose from, and if you don't want to spend an age in editing software these are pleasing enough, although they can soon veer into cheesy.

Sony's image stabilisation continues to be the best around, with solid performance in steady movements like panning, although the IBIS struggled with heavier movements. Walking is softened by the IBIS, but don't expect iPhone-like smoothness straight out of the camera.

Autofocus on the Sony A6700 for video is awesome. Sony has led the pack for some time here, and while other brands have caught up, Sony seems to still be a whisker ahead. Tracking subjects turning away or moving in and out of frame is solid, and the camera rarely insists on finding subjects in random inanimate objects, a common complaint with other systems.

Gareth Bevan

SPECS

SENSOR: 26MP BSI EXMOR R **IMAGE PROCESSOR:** BIONZ XR + AI PROCESSOR **AF POINTS:** 759 POINTS (PHASE-DETECTION AF **ISO RANGE:** 100-32,000 (80-102,400 EXTENDED) **MAX IMAGE SIZE:** 6192 X 4128PX (L) **IMAGE STABILISATION:** 5-STOP IN-BODY **MAX BURST:** 11 FRAMES PER SECOND (BUFFER OF 1000 JPGS OR 59 RAW) **VIDEO:** 4K 120P/60P, HD 240P (S-LOG3, LUT, S-CINE) **EVF:** 2359K XGA ELECTRONIC VIEWFINDER **LCD:** 3-INCH SIDE-FLIP TOUCHSCREEN **MEMORY CARD:** 1X UHS-II SD CARD SLOT **CONNECTIVITY:** HEADPHONE/MICROPHONE JACK, HDMI, USB-C, BLUETOOTH AND WIFI **POWER:** NP-FZ100 BATTERY **SIZE (W X H X D):** 122 X 69 X 75.1MM **WEIGHT:** 409G (APPROX)

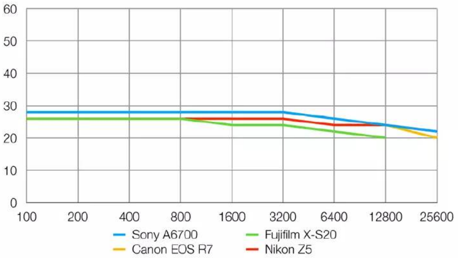
VERDICT

The Sony A6700's design and tech refinements make it a compelling upgrade from the A6600. It's now the best Sony APS-C camera to buy for stills, while improved 4K video and AI autofocus make it an alternative to Sony's ZV line-up. Overall, it's an ideal option for travel photographers or content creators who want professional features in a small package.

★★★★½

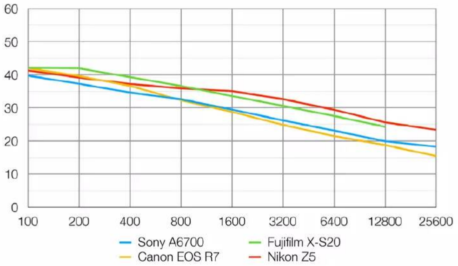
LAB TESTS

RESOLUTION (LINE WIDTHS/PICTURE HEIGHT)



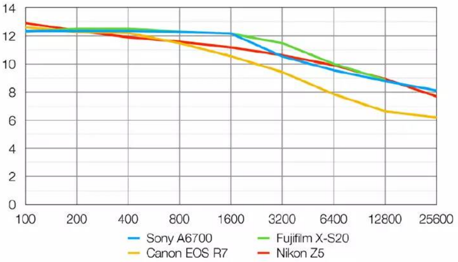
We tested the Sony A6700 against the Canon EOS R7, the Fujifilm X-S20 and the Nikon Z 5. The 26MP A6700 does well to resolve a comparable level of fine detail to the 32.5MP Canon EOS R7 throughout the tested sensitivity range.

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (DECIBELS)



The A6700 doesn't score highly here, producing noisier images than the X-S20. It's not surprising that the Nikon Z 5 outperforms the A6700 here – its full-frame sensor allows for relatively large individual photosites, which in turn can be more light-sensitive and less likely to generate noise.

DYNAMIC RANGE (EV)



There's little to separate the A6700 from the Fujifilm X-S20 and Nikon Z5 when it comes to dynamic range.

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